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National Academy of Public Administration
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July 5, 1989

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Major General Robert F. Durkin
Director, Defense Mapping Agency
8613 Lee Highway
Fairfax, VA 22031-2137

Dear General Durkin:

The NAPA Panel on Intelligence Agency Personnel Systems has concluded its review of the Defense Mapping Agency proposals for more flexible personnel authorities. This review included extensive briefings of Panel staff by senior DMA managers, review of data on the operation of the current personnel situation at DMA, detailed review of your proposals for improvement, and the briefing you and your senior managers provided to the Panel. We are pleased to provide you the conclusions reached from this review.

It is very clear that DMA has a major personnel problem which threatens accomplishment of the agency's mission. In recent years there has been a steep decline in the quality of new professional staff hired. In Fiscal Year 1987, only one percent of DMA professional hires were at the GS-5 level. In contrast, Fiscal Year 1989 hires to date include 30 percent at GS-5 because of the inability to attract candidates qualified at GS-7 by reason of better academic preparation or higher grade point averages.

In addition, turnover of professional staff is substantially above the levels found in the intelligence community agencies. Overall turnover is averaging 12-13 percent with turnover in mainstream professional positions averaging 10 percent. In the Washington area, professional turnover is even higher at 14 percent. These disturbing trends are occurring at the very time DMA needs to increase staff quality as it is installing the new Digital Production System.

This Digital Production System is introducing a major change in work technology. This change will directly affect about half the DMA staff and indirectly affect most of the others. A greater number of professional staff will be needed with skill in the physical sciences, mathematics, computer science, systems programming, data base management, and digital image interpretation, manipulation and extraction. These are the type skills for which the federal government is seldom competitive with the private sector. Furthermore, as we discussed in our recent report to Congress, labor force projections indicate there will be increased competition for persons with scientific and technical training over the next decade. DMA is, therefore, faced with the problem of competing for an increasingly technical professional workforce at the same time its experience demonstrates a growing inability to attract and retain high quality people.

The agency has undertaken a major effort to resolve its personnel problems within existing civil service authorities. There have been improvements in DMA personnel management programs, which should be continued and in some cases even expanded. However, they have not improved DMA's ability to compete in the marketplace for high quality technical staff. And, the Panel is very doubtful that DMA can become competitive for highly skilled staff within the constraints of existing civil service laws and regulations.

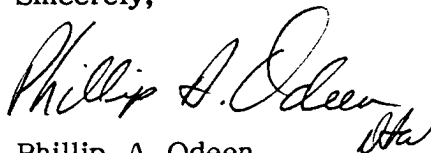
By contrast the record of the intelligence community agencies in attracting and retaining quality personnel is excellent. This has been accomplished during a period of rapid agency growth and in the face of tough marketplace competition for many of the same skills needed by DMA. In the Panel's view this success is due in large part to the flexible personnel authorities granted these agencies.

It is the Panel's considered judgement that DMA needs personnel authority similar to that which has been granted by Congress to the Defense Intelligence Agency and the military intelligence agencies. Such authority should enable DMA to establish an exempt personnel system with appointment, classification, compensation, and qualification systems and procedures which will meet the agency's needs. Changes are clearly needed to enable DMA to hire persons directly, to establish classification and qualification standards to meet the agency's unique needs, and to develop a competitive compensation structure for hard to fill positions.

The Digital Production System represents a new level of technology as well as an investment of over two and a half billion dollars. Without fundamental changes in the DMA personnel system, there is the very real risk that this new system will not be fully effective. Without enhanced personnel authorities it is the Panel's view that DMA's mission will be jeopardized, impacting including such vital matters as verification, targeting activities, support to the military services, and support to the intelligence community.

The Panel believes that the significance of the DMA mission and the demonstrated personnel problems being encountered by the agency, clearly establish the need for legislation authorizing flexible personnel authorities. Furthermore, the Panel believes the DMA proposal for increased personnel flexibilities is well designed to provide the agency with the tools it needs to meet its personnel needs in the coming decade consistent with the principles of the merit system. The Panel urges prompt action by DMA to secure this authority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Phillip A. Odeen", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Phillip A. Odeen
Panel Chair

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[Redacted]

Dear General

The NAPA Panel on Intelligence Agency Personnel Systems has concluded its review of the Defense Mapping Agency proposals for more flexible personnel authorities. The Panel is pleased to provide you the conclusions reached from this review.

It is very clear that DMA has a major personnel problem which threatens accomplishment of the agency's mission. In recent years there has been a steep decline in the quality of new professional staff hired as measured by academic accomplishment. In addition, turnover of professional staff is substantially above the levels found in the intelligence community agencies. These disturbing trends are occurring at the very time DMA needs to increase staff quality as it is installing the new Digital Production System.

This Digital Production System is introducing a major change in work technology. This change will directly affect about half the DMA staff and indirectly affect the remainder. It will require a greater number of professional staff skilled in the physical sciences, mathematics, computer science, systems programming, data base management, and digital image interpretation, manipulation and extraction. These are many of the skills which the federal government is becoming less competitive with the private sector. Furthermore, as we discussed in our recent report to Congress, labor force projections indicate there will be increased competition for persons with scientific and technical training over the next decade.

DMA is therefore faced with the problem of competing for an increasingly technical professional workforce at the same time its current experience demonstrates a growing inability to attract high quality people. The agency has undertaken a major effort to solve this personnel problem within existing civil service authorities. However, these improvements in DMA personnel management programs, which should be continued and in some cases even expanded, have not improved DMA's ability to compete in the marketplace for high quality staff. And, the Panel is very doubtful that DMA can become competitive within the constraints of the civil service system.

The Panel is impressed with the record of the intelligence community agencies in attracting and retaining quality personnel. This has been accomplished during a period of rapid agency growth coupled with extensive marketplace competition for many of the same skills needed by DMA. In the Panel's view this success is due in large part to the flexible personnel authorities granted these agencies.

It is the Panel's considered judgement that DMA needs personnel authority similar to that which has been granted by Congress to the Defense Intelligence Agency and the military intelligence agencies. Such authority should enable DMA to establish appointment, classification, compensation, and qualification requirements to appoint and train employees in an exempt personnel system.

The new technology of the Digital Production System represents a significant investment of over two and a half billion dollars. Without fundamental changes in the DMA personnel system, there is the very real risk that this new system cannot be made fully effective. In fact, without enhanced ability to staff the organization, the entire DMA mission will be increasingly adversely affected, including such vital matters as United States arms verification, targeting activities, support to the military services and support to the intelligence community.

The Panel believes that the significance of the DMA mission and the demonstrated personnel problems being encountered by the agency, clearly establish the need for legislation authorizing flexible personnel authorities. In the Panel's view the DMA proposal for increased personnel flexibilities appears to be well designed to provide the agency with the tools to effectively meet its personnel needs in the coming decade consistent with the merit system. The Panel urges prompt action by DMA to secure this authority.